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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the "Standards for Foreign Language Learning" set by the language teaching profession in 1996 focuses on how the standards for communication skill are to be implemented in the second language classroom. Three different approaches designed to help learners reach the goals outlined in the standards document are presented: the Learning Pyramid, which illustrates the average retention rate for different teaching methods; J. Lee and B. VanPatten's input processing approach, based on the natural approach, which emphasizes the need for comprehensible input; and Lev Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development. Sample class activities incorporating these approaches and using the topic of the family are described. They include several activities providing comprehensible input, several processing instruction exercises, experiences capitalizing on the social nature of humans while creating meaningful contexts for language practice, and activities featuring creative repetition. Suggestions are also offered on error correction and on the translation of the Standards' goals to an applicable set of tools for the classroom. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

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ED 421 880

FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY: APPLYING THE COMMUNICATION STANDARDS TO THE CLASSROOM

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEFINED

By Charlotte E. Gifford and Jeanne P. Mullaney

With the publication of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, as well as many similar documents at the state level, our field has set ambitious, but achievable goals. As we strive for programs that will allow all learners, from grades K-12 and beyond, to have access to effective language instruction, professionals have defined communicative competence as the over-arching goal of the language learning experience. Let us examine several perspectives on communication, beginning with the *Standards* document: "When individuals have developed communicative competence in a language, they are able to convey and receive messages of many different types successfully. ... Learners use language to participate in everyday social interactions and to establish relationships with others. They converse, argue, criticize, request, convince, and explain effectively, taking into account the age, background, education and familiarity with the individuals with whom they are engaged in conversation" (36). This idea was echoed in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, where the meaning-bearing nature of communication is emphasized: "Meaningful communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information through speech, gestures, writing, behavior, or a combination of these. It is through communication that we express ourselves and transmit or receive information" (35). James Lee and Bill VanPatten, two second language acquisition researchers, also give a succinct definition of communication, saying it is "...a complex dynamic of interactions: the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning, both in and out of the classroom" (14).

While this paper will focus primarily on the communication strand of the *Standards*, it is important to note that the "Five C's," Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities, are all essential and inextricably linked. Indeed, the definitions of communication and communicative competence noted above touch on them all. For our purposes, the communication strand serves as the organizing principle: the question of knowing how, when and why to say what to whom (*Standards*, 11).

It must be admitted that most language programs have not yet reached the goals stated in the *Standards* for the communication strand. When we examine the objectives for student competency at different levels, it is clear that our students, most of whom study another language for only two years, cannot yet perform at the indicated levels. To illustrate anecdotally, it has been the authors' sad experience, more times than we care to remember, that when we are introduced on a social occasion as language teachers, we can all too often predict the response: a look of consternation crosses peoples' faces, they recoil slightly but visibly and stammer that although they took **X** years of language in school, they "cannot say a word." Comparing this reaction to the checklist of goals for communicative functions quoted above from the *Standards*, we are left to conclude that we have a long way to go.

How then, are we to meet the challenging goals set before us? We turn to the *Standards*: "To meet high communicative standards, learners must have ample opportunities to experience the second language as it is spoken and written in the target culture. Meaningful language from real contexts becomes the basis for subsequent development of expressive skills" (35). In this paper, we will examine three different approaches to help our learners reach the goals outlined in the *Standards*.

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We begin by contrasting more effective and less effective techniques in order to identify which teaching and learning practices work and which do not. In the *Standards*, we find two observations in clear contrast; first, the 'bad news:' "We now know that students do not acquire communicative competence by learning the elements of the language system first. It is not the case that learners learn best by memorizing vocabulary items in isolation and by producing limited sentences. We now know that even those students who learn grammar well and are able to pass tests on nouns, verb conjugations, tense usage and the like may be quite unable to understand the language itself when it is spoken to them outside the classroom" (36).

Fortunately, the 'good news' is much more encouraging, reminding us that the goals we have set for ourselves are wholly attainable. The *Standards* go on to point out: "We now know that learners learn a language best when they are provided opportunities to use the target language to communicate in a wide variety of activities. The more learners use the target language in meaningful situations, the more rapidly they achieve competency. Active use of language is central to the learning process; therefore, learners must be involved in generating utterances for themselves. They learn by doing, by trying out language, and by modifying it to serve communicative needs" (36). It is therefore up to us to create and provide learning environments that offer these kinds of opportunities. If we want students to achieve communicative competency, we must emphasize the use of whole, real-world language over the exclusive analysis of its parts.

THE LEARNING PYRAMID

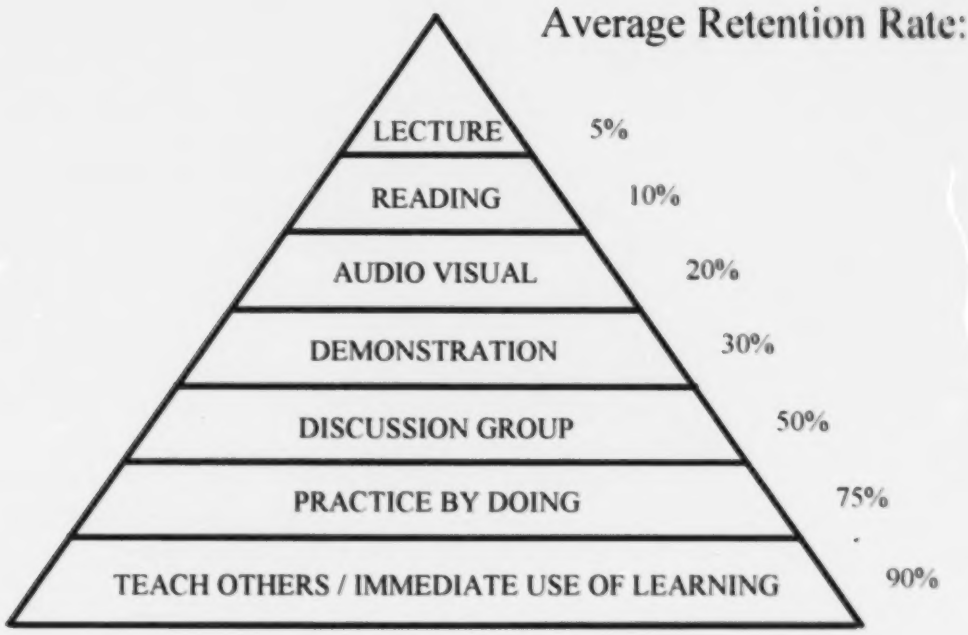
As we examine more and less effective ways learners learn a language, it is also important to reflect similarly on the delivery system: our teaching techniques. Research shows that learner retention rates vary widely depending on the teaching techniques employed. One helpful visual representation is the "Learning Pyramid," formulated by the National Training Laboratory of Bethel, Maine. It illustrates the average retention rate for different teaching methodologies (fig. 1).

Starting at the less effective top point of the pyramid, a traditional lecture format yields only an average 5 % retention rate; this would indicate that the model of the teacher-expert dispensing information about the language system to the receptive vessel-learners will not yield proficient language users. In the context of the *Standards'* observation on effective learning situations, most interesting on the Pyramid are the types of methodologies that tip the scale past the 50 % mark (discussion group, practice by doing, teaching others/immediate use of knowledge). They reflect the pair and group work and cooperative learning models that we know from classroom experience to be highly effective. We can conclude that successful language teaching focuses its attention at the base of the pyramid.

Nevertheless, as we will discuss in this paper, the use of many different modalities is itself valuable, as it enables teachers to capitalize on the varied learning styles seen in our diverse population of learners. This would indicate that the Learning Pyramid can be viewed as a proportional whole; there should be room, or perhaps a time and a place, for all of these modalities, always bearing in mind the research findings on efficacy. That is to say, since not all learners are "average," we can predict that some learners will retain information quite nicely from the modalities at the top of the pyramid, although probably better when used in conjunction with others. Thus, we can concentrate our efforts on the solid base of the Learning Pyramid, while at the same time liberally sprinkling our teaching with the modalities at the top.

Fig. 1

LEARNING PYRAMID



National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine

INPUT PROCESSING IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

We examine next the work of Lee and VanPatten, two researchers who are specialists in the field of second language acquisition. They base much of their work on Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach, stressing the importance of comprehensible input (in Krashen's terms, at the level i + 1, or just a little above the learner's current level). However, they note that while input is critical, it is not the only factor at play in second language acquisition. They also emphasize the uniquely social nature of language and see language in a functional role, as a tool for communication. As noted in the discussion of the Learning Pyramid, there is room for all kinds of learning, but input alone would keep learners at the top (lecture, reading, audiovisual), whereas functional language use in context involves the particularly valuable base section of the pyramid (immediate use of learning).

Lee and VanPatten outline the process by which learners acquire the target language in a series of steps (fig. 2). We will begin at the end of this diagram. Before they can produce language (*output*), learners must construct an internal system or representation of the language (*developing system*). They must then access this developing system to produce language. Lee

and VanPatten define access as the retrieval of correct forms from memory; that is to say, "being able to express a particular meaning via a particular form or structure" (119) (fig. 3).

Fig. 2

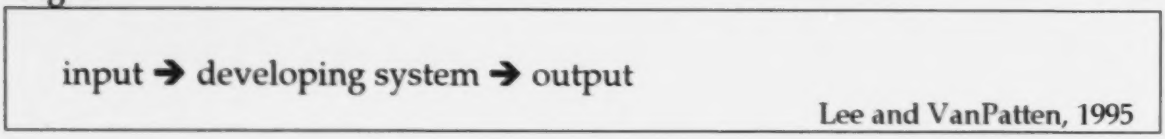
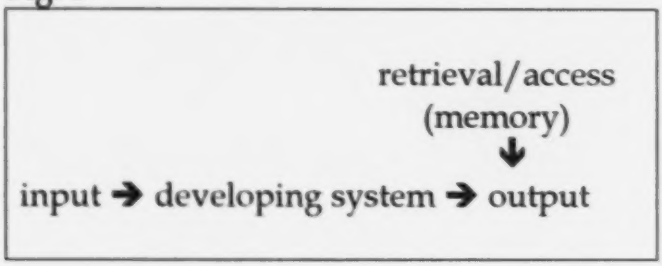
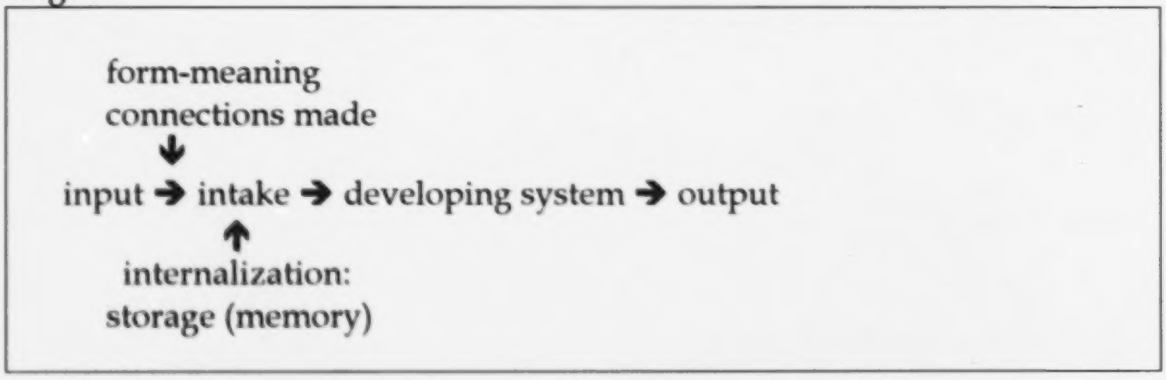


Fig. 3



However, they maintain that there is still an essential precursor to these steps: exposure to and understanding of the target language (*comprehensible input*). Lee and VanPatten define input as "language that the learner hears (or sees) and attends to for its meaning" (28) Comprehensible, meaning-bearing input is the critical first step for successful language acquisition; here learners make crucial connections between form and meaning within the developing systems (fig. 4). As Long puts it, "comprehensible input is a necessary (but perhaps not sufficient) ingredient of language acquisition. What this means is that successful language acquisition cannot happen without comprehensible input (cited in Lee and VanPatten, 29). It is the starting point of language acquisition; without quantities of effective input, the learner cannot progress to true communicative proficiency.

Fig. 4

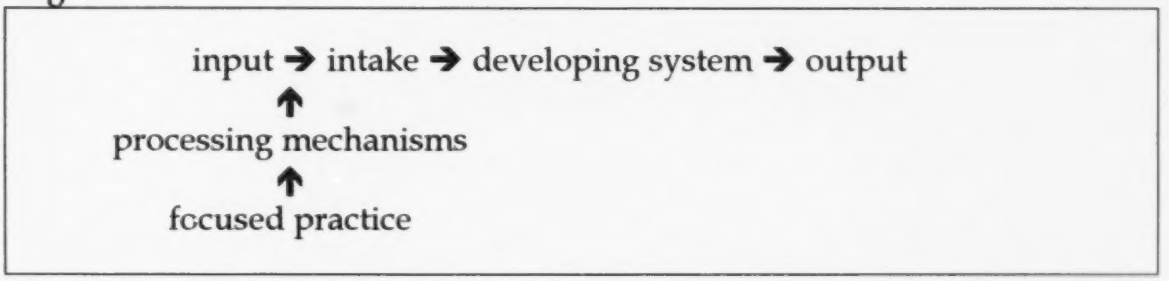


Lee and VanPatten further define effective input, characterizing the qualities that will permit the process of SLA to take place. First, input must be meaning-bearing; without any real communicative value, input is not useful to the acquisition process: "... the language the learner is

listening to (or reading) must contain some message to which the learner is supposed to attend" (38). Second, input must be comprehensible: "The learner must be able to understand most of what the speaker (or writer) is saying if acquisition is to happen" (38). This means that input must be both comprehensible and meaning-bearing in order to fuel the engine of language acquisition. They conclude that "... input is useful to the learner only if it is comprehensible. A stream of speech that runs by the learner and sounds like jibberish is not good input. In short, every time a learner hears or reads an utterance, is actively engaged in trying to get the meaning of what the speaker or writer is conveying, and can understand most or some of the utterance, he is getting input for those internal mechanisms to work on" (28-29).

However, Lee and VanPatten argue that there is an important link to be noted between the input provided and the learner's developing system. Learners process input as they try to understand its meaning. Since input is thus filtered, intake is not necessarily the same as input (fig. 5). They state: "While input is the language the learner is exposed to, intake is the language that the learner actually attends to and that gets processed in working memory in some way" (42). The importance to their model is that "the brain uses intake, and not raw input data, to create a linguistic system" (94). This would indicate that we must address the intake phase of second language learning.

Fig. 5



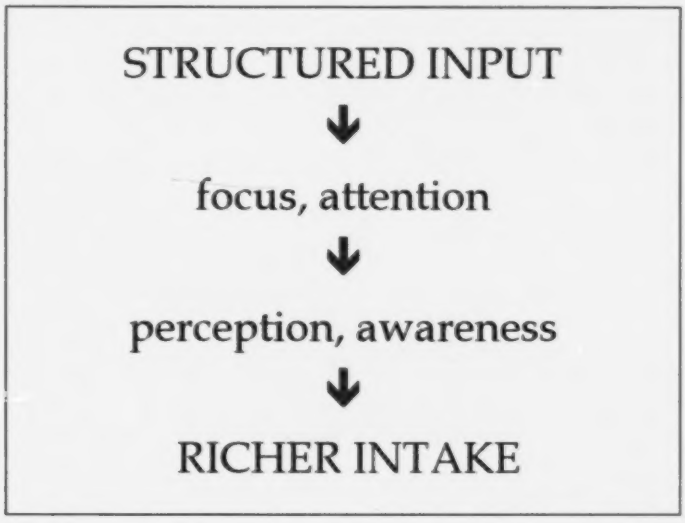
In traditional grammar practice, learners are asked to practice, to produce, to talk and to write. In other words, learners are working at the output end of Lee and VanPatten's model. But this presents us with an inherent contradiction: the development of the learner's internal system is dependent on input, while traditional grammar practice is based on output. Usually following a deductive pattern, the teacher's explanation is followed by practice and drill. Whether we deem the work mechanical, meaningful or communicative, it's all about production of language. Lee and VanPatten ask "Under this traditional scenario, how is the developing system provided with the relevant input data that is both comprehensible and meaningful? Because it focuses on output, traditional grammar instruction engages those processes involved in *accessing* a developing system rather than those involved in forming the system. . . . In short, traditional grammar instruction, which is intended to cause a change in the developing system, is akin to putting the cart before the horse when it comes to acquisition; the learner is asked to produce when the developing system has not yet had a chance to build up a representation of the language based on input data" (95).

This is to say that it is unreasonable to expect learners to use language successfully if we have not yet primed the pump by providing the necessary initial exposure to functional language in a meaningful context. Our ultimate goal, of course, is independent student production of

language; but, since input must feed the developing system and thus allow output, we must take a closer look at the input end of the equation. We must put the horse back in front of the cart.

We can aim our focused practice first of all at the input end of the equation, and in so doing, we can target the processing mechanisms learners use in converting input to intake. This means we need to focus learner attention to the form as a key part of the comprehensible, meaning-bearing whole (fig. 6).

Fig. 6



Lee and VanPatten call the approach input processing instruction: "a new kind of grammar instruction, one that will guide and focus the learner's attention when they process input" (99) for meaning. They are certainly not alone in the field in this conclusion. Several other researchers describe the same approach in different terms. Sharwood Smith calls it "input enhancement" (cited in Lee and VanPatten, 32). Larsen-Freeman refers to "form-focused instruction;" and asserts that " focusing student attention facilitates student intake" (139). Perhaps most succinctly, Schmidt observes that "noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for converting input to intake" (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 139).

The following is an example of an input processing activity. Working with a simple grid (fig. 7), students must recognize and categorize sentences by time frame (past, present or future), using tense and form to justify their choices. As Lee and VanPatten note in their guidelines for such activities, the targeted input upon which we want to focus learner attention should be varied in form: written, oral or both. In this example, students hear each sentence read aloud.

Another critical item from Lee and VanPatten's guidelines state that general comprehension must be assured if learners are to successfully focus on the forms we have targeted; processing capacities of human beings are limited. If students cannot understand the basic concept of the sentence, they cannot possibly attend to form as well; a processing bottleneck will block intake. The communicative content of the input must come at little or no cost to attention. Thus, we advocate the extensive use of visuals to ensure comprehension. Even better, if these same visuals have already been used in class as part of the initial exposure to language

(comprehensible input), students will be familiar with both the photos and what they represent. (A picture of skiers on a lift could represent the whole idea of skiing/to ski.)

Thus, in this activity, the learners' first task is to correctly identify the numbered picture propped on the chalk rail or taped to the wall. Then they must choose which of the words at the top of the grid ('Hier,' 'd'habitude' or 'demain') could logically start the sentence they have just heard. Finally, in order to force the focus on the form-meaning connection, they must write the form (verb) that justifies their contextual choice in the column labeled 'preuve,' or proof. For example, when hearing the sentence "Nous allons faire du ski ensemble dans le Vermont," students will note the number of the picture, put a check in the "Demain" column to reflect the future time frame and write "nous allons faire" to support their choice. Now they have linked meaning (the lexical item, demain) and form (the verb in the future, "aller" + infinitive).

Fig. 7

I) Écoutez chaque phrase. Choisissez la photo logique. Choisissez le contexte temporel logique. Écrivez la forme qui correspond à votre choix.

	nº	Hier ...	D'habitude ...	Demain ...	la preuve:
1	____	☐	☐	☐	
2	____	☐	☐	☐	
3	____	☐	☐	☐	
4	____	☐	☐	☐	
5	____	☐	☐	☐	
6	____	☐	☐	☐	
7	____	☐	☐	☐	
8	____	☐	☐	☐	
9	____	☐	☐	☐	
10	____	☐	☐	☐	

Students hear the following sentences:

1. J'ai joué avec mes filles.
2. Nous allons faire du ski.
3. Je prends deux tasses de café.
4. Je vais faire du pain.
5. J'adore aller à la plage.
6. J'ai lu un bon livre dans la baignoire.
7. Nous avons pris de la pizza au dîner.
8. Je vais laver la vaisselle.
9. Vous avez beaucoup étudié.
10. Je fais du vélo avec ma famille.

It is also important to bear in mind learners' natural processing strategies; we do not include the lexical items 'hier,' 'd'habitude' or 'demain' in the input. Since humans beings process lexical items ('demain') before morphological items ('nous allons faire'), our learners would process only for meaning and fail to attend to form. Students must make that choice in order to bind form and meaning. Finally, whenever possible, targeted input should steadily increase in complexity, moving from single sentences to connected discourse.

We would note in passing that this particular activity was used both in the classroom and as an assessment tool on a traditional end-of-chapter test. Many structured input activities lend themselves to this dual purpose use; moreover, we believe this is consistent with current assessment philosophy which emphasizes a test-as-we-teach approach. In other words, testing should mirror classroom practice.

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In the same way that the *Standards* and the Learning Pyramid highlight the importance of learning in the process of doing, Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development also emphasizes the importance of active learning. His theory is a sociocultural theory which asserts that "human development cannot be viewed independently of social context" (Schinke-Llano, 1995, 22). Further, it holds that "development is social, not individual, and is the result of joint problem-solving activities," (Schinke-Llano, 1993, 123). This is one reason that pair and group work are so important in the classroom.

Pair and group work is especially effective for language learning because, as Vygotsky put it, "the primary function of language and speech is social, for the purpose of communicating culturally established meanings," (Dixon-Krauss, 17). Interestingly, the *Standards* also highlight the social aspect of language; they say that "language and communication are at the heart of human experience" (7) and that "to relate in a meaningful way to another human being, one must be able to communicate" (11).

According to Vygotsky, language acquisition "occurs as a result of meaningful verbal interaction . . . between novices and experts in the environment" (Schinke-Llano, 1995, 22). In other words, acquisition comes as a result of the meaningful, communicative use of language. Vygotsky explains further that "mastering or developing mental functions must be fostered through collaborative, not independent or isolated activities," because of the social nature of humans (Moll, 3). Heap accounts for this by stating that "social conventions such as language . . . could not be learned alone, because there could be no conventions in a world of one" (Cited in Dixon-Krauss, 126).

Regarding specific teaching approaches, Vygotsky advocated creating experiences for helping people learn. For him, this meant "the creation of social contexts in which students actively learn to use, try and manipulate language in the service of making sense or creating meaning" (Moll, 8). Thus, the role-plays that teachers often use in class are effective because they provide these sorts of opportunities for students.

An important facet of Vygotsky's theory is that of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This can be loosely defined as the area in which learning takes place, although Vygotsky defined it as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, 86). There

are two main characteristics of the ZPD. First, the task that the student undertakes must be a little above that individual's current level of ability; it should stretch his or her capabilities, but not be completely beyond them. In Krashen's terms, the task must be at the i + 1 level. Second, there must be an adult or a more skilled peer to mediate between the learner and the task or problem at hand.

What is particularly interesting about the ZPD is the idea that what individuals can do today with the collaboration of an adult or more capable peer, they can do competently on their own tomorrow. Thus, the potential developmental level of the learner becomes the next actual developmental level as a result of the learner's interactions with others and the concomitant expanding of cognitive abilities. Once again, this is the reason that it is so important that learners work together in pairs and groups.

As a result, the ZPD allows performance to precede competence; in other words, skill-using comes before and actually enables skill-getting. Thus, the argument about which should come first is rendered moot; instead, skill-using and skill-getting go hand-in-hand. This notion is also echoed in the *Standards*, which say that "active use of language is central to the learning process; therefore, learners must be involved in generating utterances for themselves. They learn by doing, by trying out language, and by modifying it to serve communicative needs" (37).

A related idea of Vygotsky's is that of the nonlinear nature of development. He believed that learners progress and regress as they develop; there is an ebb and flow of both linguistic and cognitive development. Therefore, errors should not be viewed as "flawed learning or even as approximations of the target language, but rather as a result of a learner's trying to get control of a task" (Schinke-Llano, 1993, 126). Vygotsky's theory also holds that "every function in the learner's cultural development appears twice, on two levels. First, on the social, and later, on the psychological level, first, between people as an interpsychological category, and then inside . . . , as an intrapsychological category" (Vygotsky, 1978, 86). Since Vygotsky's theory maintains that "higher mental functions appear initially in an external form because they are social processes," internalization can be defined as the "process involved in the transformation of social phenomena into psychological phenomena" (Wertsch, 1985b, 62).

To illustrate this process of internalization, one concrete classroom example is the following interview activity which mimics a common social exchange, that of showing and describing wallet photos. In pairs, students show each other a photograph of a significant family member and detail who the people in the photo are. The partners ask follow-up questions to elicit as much information as possible. For a novice-level group, this could include the person's relationship to the learner, name, age, residence, likes and dislikes, occupation, etc. After this social exchange, (interpersonal and interspsychological) learners are better equipped for the extension activity assigned as a composition. In this assignment, learners write a short composition on a family member. This two-phase process is consistent with Vygotsky's view that all language learning must begin on an interpersonal level, such as a social interaction, but, in order to be internalized, must move to the intrapersonal level. In other words, for language learners, personalized equals internalized.

As in the case of Lee and VanPatten's input processing, classroom practice can be reflected in assessment. In a mid-term oral interview students repeated this show-and-tell photo activity with their instructor. Student confidence was high because of several factors. First, the activity itself was familiar and therefore less threatening. Second, the photograph acted as both a prop and a means of support for the students. In the words of one learner, "When I forgot what I

wanted to say, I looked at the photo and the words came back." In Krashen's terms, the affective filter was down and learners' anxiety was reduced.

To sum up, because language is a social construct and humans are social beings, there could be no better way to learn it than in pairs and groups. Also, since individuals learn everything twice, creative use of repetition in teaching is necessary to allow internalization to take place.

Regarding Vygotskian theory, the implications for teachers are many. First, it is clear that we must not take a banking or assembly line approach to teaching. The relationship between teachers and students is no longer that of the expert and the receptive vessel; rather, the expert should act as a guide or facilitator who aids the novice in learning. Teachers must learn to view the classroom as the social organization that it is and look for new ways to provide a supportive instructional environment that focuses on social interaction (Dixon-Krauss, 1996, 20). Likewise, teachers should enable learners to participate in speech and literacy events and authentic social transactions in which the second language is a tool for communication (Goodman and Goodman, 238). In the words of Joseph Foley, they must "teach the second language system not as an end in itself, but as a resource for achieving meaning." (36).

Second, if the purpose of teaching is to enable learners to progress though the ZPD, Vygotsky contends that instruction is good only when it proceeds ahead of development. Then, it "awakens and rouses to life an entirely different set of functions which are in the state of maturing, which lie in the ZPD" (cited in Wertsch, 1985, 71). Teachers must therefore provide abundant i + 1 input and many different kinds of opportunities for the zones of proximal development to occur. Authentic language experiences, in which learners are engage in purposeful and meaningful use of language are the best kind. In addition, "peer teaching and collaborative learning are viable complements to teacher-student dialogic activity" (Schinke-Llano, 1995, 24), because there is "growing evidence that collaborative learning between peers, regardless of ability, activates the ZPD" (Goodman and Goodman, 228). Indeed, Donato's study indicates that "collaborative work among language learners provides the same opportunity for scaffolded help as in expert-novice relationships" (41). Additionally, teachers must consider different kinds of activities outside of class such as interviewing other teachers, students or community members. These activities create realistic, social contexts in which learners can use the second language as a tool for communication while at the same time getting support from a native speaker, according to the Vygotskian model.

CREATIVE REPETITION

Vygotsky highlights the need for multiple experiences to facilitate language acquisition It is therefore incumbent on instructors to provide many different approaches in the classroom; we term this "creative repetition." In contrast to traditional drill, where the same pattern is repeated over and over, creative repetition involves coming at the same topic from all angles. It is a philosophy that recognizes that repetition is *not* the soul of education, that one size does *not* fit all and that all great minds do *not* think alike.

Not coincidentally, we must acknowledge that our learner population is not the same homogeneous college-bound group it was in years past. If we are to respond to the *Standards*' challenge to reach all and to teach all, no single approach will suffice. Instructors must cast a

broad net of widely varied activities that appeal to different learning styles in an attempt to engage all learners.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Thus, in answer to the question of what is effective and will enable our learners to reach the high communicative goals that have been set for them, we would like to propose some concrete examples of activities using the topic of the family as a starting point. First, several activities which provide comprehensible input for learners include photographs of the instructor's family which students regard as the teacher introduces the new vocabulary, and video segments such as the ones in *Destinos* or *French in Action* which present the vocabulary in a highly contextualized format. Teachers could also use a picture file to introduce this vocabulary.

Second, some examples of processing instruction activities are true and false exercises based on the family trees that students worked with at the comprehensible input stage. Similarly, there is an activity called "Relaciones famosas" (¿Sabías que . . . ?, 112) which requires students to process the target vocabulary and provide the correct famous person. For instance, one of the examples in this activity asks students for the name of Paloma Picasso's father. It is important to note that none of these activities requires learners to produce the new vocabulary, although they must understand it in order to successfully complete the activity. The purpose of these activities is mainly to allow learners to hear and process the new vocabulary.

The third type of activities can be termed Vygotskian experiences. These are intended to capitalize on the social nature of humans while creating meaningful contexts for them to practice using the language they are learning. The photo activity referred to earlier is one such example. Another of the most common examples of a Vygotskian experience is the interview in which one learner finds out about another learner's family and then reports back to someone else about what was learned. Learners can also draw each other's family trees, working in pairs and guiding one another with the correct familial information. They can be seated so that they cannot see their partner's rendering of the family tree and thus must rely on language to ensure that it is drawn accurately. Another sample activity involves asking learners to bring a personal photograph to class and describe who that person is to others in a small group.

Finally, the activities termed creative repetition are many and varied, because they are intended to provide meaningful, interesting practice to allow students the necessary time for internalization. Some examples of these kinds of activities include information exchange activities such as polls, signature searches, and information gap activities. Students can also write personalized statements, comparing and contrasting their families with the ones they have seen on video or in pictures from the picture file. In addition, they can write paragraphs and compositions describing their whole family or a particular member of the family.

Another example of a technique that allows instructors to use creative repetition in teaching is that of the Carousel Activities. These are brainstorming activities for elementary and intermediate level language learners. They are intended to expose students to a wide range of language on a given topic, to allow students to brainstorm freely, to have students work cooperatively as a team, to permit students to draw on each other as resources, to let students customize new lexical material to meet their personal communication needs, and to apply these new tools orally and in writing.

First, the instructor must post large sheets of newsprint around the room. The number of sheets will be determined by both the topic and the size of the class. Next, teachers must divide the class into groups of not more than five students; in larger groups, not all will participate actively. In this example, there are five sheets, each with a different holiday written on it as a heading. Below the name of the holiday are three general categories: activities, food and associations. A sample sheet appears below:

Saint Valentine's Day		
activities:	food:	associations:

In small groups, students go to their first station. Each group has a secretary with a different color marker (this helps identify the contributors later); all other students are responsible to be the editors. On the teacher's signal, the group begins brainstorming items to add to the assigned category. As the groups work, the teacher circulates and assists students to add the personal vocabulary they wish to include. After a set period of time, the teacher gives the signal to move to the next sheet; students move in a circular pattern around the room from sheet to sheet, adding items to the lists that do not duplicate previous entries.

This activity can spiral and recycle to include all language learning skills; for example, as students move from sheet to sheet, they must be sure not to repeat previous entries. Practice in reading comprehension is assured because a group must first stop at each new sheet to read and process the prior groups' work before making any additions.

After the carousel is complete, the teacher can run over the entries with the whole group. this is an opportunity for comprehensible input from the teacher in expanding the entries from list form to oral language. Students can be asked for responses, whether as Q&A ([*name*], do you get many chocolates for Valentine's Day?) or by a show of hands (How many of you got chocolates this year?). This phase of the Carousel develops students' oral comprehension while at the same time giving them the chance to internalize the new vocabulary.

Next, since most students will express themselves in the context of their own culture, this is an excellent opportunity to make cultural comparisons with the target cultures.

In preparation for the final application of the activity, students pair up and discuss their favorite holiday of the examples posted. Because they now have at their fingertips quantities of useful language to incorporate in the discussion, this phase of the activity provides the opportunity for them to practice expressing themselves in the target language. It helps to keep the suggested items of discussion in synch with the list, e.g.: What do you like to do on _____, What do you eat on _____, What do you like best/least about _____. They report back to the whole class on their similarities and differences.

With this extensive preparation behind them, students can now write a short composition on their favorite holiday without the frustration of knowing what they want to say in English but

lacking the ability to express it in the target language. It can be quite useful to give students an edited handout of the lists to work with as they prepare their compositions at home or in class. Thus, in this final phase of the Carousel, they are developing their writing skills in a supportive, contextualized, meaningful way.

Varied approaches such as the Carousel Activities are interesting, worthwhile, and time-consuming. If we are to make use of these varied approaches, we must examine our curriculum and make hard choices. Rather than be ruled and driven by the number of chapters of a text we must cover, we should adopt a philosophy of "teach less, learn more," accepting that we have been unrealistic in the past. Our new goal is to offer learners many chances to be exposed to and to use the language. Thus, they can consistently demonstrate what they know in the language well and reliably, not superficially and only for the chapter test.

ERROR CORRECTION

It is well-documented that when learners start producing language, or making the shift from input to output, errors often result. In fact, we know that speech emergence is characterized by mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and syntax. Anyone who has observed children acquiring their first language has witnessed this. While first and second language acquisition are not exactly the same, it is reasonable to believe that they are more similar than dissimilar. Therefore, it is illogical to assume that second language acquisition could be error-free.

It is also important to remember Vygotsky's view of errors. His theory holds that they should not be considered to be "flawed learning or even as approximations of the target language, but rather as the result of a learner's trying to gain control of a task" (Schinke-Llano, 1993, 126). Further, learning to speak a second language without making any errors is analogous to trying to learn how to ski without falling. The only way to learn is to point one's skis downhill; it is both normal and natural to experience a few falls along the way.

Besides being characteristic, Corder asserts that errors are useful to learners. "(Errors) are indispensable to the learner himself , because we can regard the errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn. It is a way the learner has of testing his hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning. The making of errors then is a strategy employed both by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language" (cited in Lee and VanPatten, 22).

Further, Lee and VanPatten point out that "learners' grammatical accuracy depends on the kind of tasks they are engaged in" (31). Indeed, they are less likely to be accurate when the focus of the activity is on communication than when the focus is on the form of the utterance.

Thus, if errors are inevitable, the issue that then arises for teachers is how to react to them. First, teachers must realize that they have less control over output than they would perhaps like to think. However, they can have more control over input and input processing, which will in turn fuel the developing system, enabling learners to produce better quality output. Second, responding to student errors is a balancing act; teachers should and do respond differently to different errors on different tasks. Lee and VanPatten (166) list these possible responses to erroneous learner output:

1. direct correction (pointing out the error)

2. indirect correction (rephrasing the learner's utterance to look like a confirmation check and to model correct grammar)
3. delayed feedback (noting learners' common errors and then pointing them out at the end of class or on a review day
4. no special feedback

For instance, a teacher might choose indirect correction in order not to interfere with a communicative activity, whereas s/he would probably use either direct correction or delayed feedback for an exercise in which the emphasis is on form and grammar. This same teacher might provide no special feedback to a student who spontaneously communicates something of personal importance in the target language. Clearly, each type of feedback has a particular purpose and the teacher must decide which is appropriate for each individual student, according to the type of error and the kind of activity the student is involved in. Nevertheless, teachers should beware of the misunderstandings that can be caused by direct correction. These result when the learner is focused on communicating and the teacher concentrates mainly on the grammatical form of the utterance, sometimes at the expense of the learner's message. Unfortunately, this can lead the learner to conclude that form alone matters more than personal self-expression. For some learners, the resulting fear of making errors raises the affective filter so high that they are unwilling to take the risks involved in real communication.

But let us not digress from the topic of what enables learners to learn most effectively. The *Standards* assert that: "Learners learn a language best when they are provided opportunities to use the target language to communicate in a wide range of activities. The more learners use the target language in meaningful situations, the more rapidly they achieve competency. Active use of language is central to the learning process; therefore, learners must be involved in generating utterances for themselves. They learn by doing, by trying out language and by modifying it to serve communicative needs. Regardless of their stage of language acquisition, learners require strategies that allow them to compensate for language which they have not yet mastered." (37). For example, learners must be able to circumlocute, rephrase, guess intelligently in context, use appropriate gestures, draw logical conclusions and persevere (30)

Further, the *Standards* advise us that "Many of these strategies are inherent in some learners; other students will have to be taught specifically how to use strategies to interpret meaning and to deliver messages. Therefore, it is essential that teachers develop classroom activities that provide students with ample exposure and practice using those strategies as an integral part of instruction from the very earliest stages of language learning" (30)

APPLICATION OF THE COMMUNICATION GOAL: MACRO TO MICRO

Our task is to translate the *Standards*' goal into an applicable set of tools for the reality of the classroom. In order to accomplish this, we must acknowledge what the *Standards* state clearly: "This is not a stand-alone document. It must be used in conjunction with state and local frameworks and standards to determine the best approaches and reasonable expectations for the students in individual districts and schools. ... Each of these documents will influence and inform the others as administrators, teachers, parents and others work together to ensure that tomorrow's learners are equipped to function in an ever-shrinking world." (24)

We return to the example offered in standard 1.1 "Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions." This is a goal we can agree on, but it is difficult to plan any single class around it; as this standard reflects the big picture, we must break it down to reveal the underlying skills it entails. Some state frameworks are more specific; the Massachusetts document offers a list of language functions we can point to as we lay out our objectives for our classes. Some samples include: "... students will greet and respond to greetings, ask and answer questions, make and respond to requests, express likes, dislikes and feelings ..."

Thanks to a project sponsored by the American Association of Community Colleges and the National Endowment for the Humanities, in 1993, Greenfield Community College established a curriculum based on performance objectives. Working primarily with the ACTFL guidelines for the five skills as a resource, we grappled with the same question faced by the writers of the *Standards* and state frameworks: What should learners know and be able to do with the target language? Beginning with the "macro level," we determined that students would be required "to demonstrate proficiency in all five skill areas, listening, speaking, reading, writing and culture." The next step was to outline more specific language functions, such as "Students should be able to understand speech on familiar topics at normal speed, interact orally on familiar topics, use language for personal communication needs, ask and answer questions, request clarification as needed." Subsequently, it was necessary to outline the "familiar topics" that we referred to so frequently. This involved the hard choices alluded to in the teach less, learn more paradigm. With this accomplished, we could easily craft very specific performance objectives such as: State and ask age, List family members, Briefly describe people, List/Narrate routines in logical order, State and ask about future plans. The resulting document allows us to observe student language use and judge objectively whether or not the learner meets the departmental standard we have set. This experience showed how it is possible to move from Macro to Micro, from the general goal to the specific functions and objectives necessary to achieve the goal. As a side benefit, the development and implementation of these objectives has freed all instructors to teach as they see fit because there is no one right teaching style when all instructors are striving for the same aligned goals.

CONCLUSION: ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to note that the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners have been redefined as part of the paradigm shift in how we view teaching and learning. The *Standards* remind us that "Any language learner, regardless of age, must internalize (whether consciously or unconsciously) the sound system, a basic lexicon, basic grammatical structures, communication strategies, and rules about how the language is used appropriately in interaction" (20). They go on to state that "Learning a language requires active mental engagement by the students" (30). Lee and VanPatten express this new reality most succinctly, "the expert role for instructors and receptive-vessel role for students, as well as the notion that learning takes place through explanation and question answering, are comfortable roles and notions. We slip into them easily. Students walk into our classrooms assuming that we will transmit to them our knowledge. However, the assumption is clearly incorrect when it comes to learning another language. We need look no further than the students' knowledge at the end of the semester for proof of its inaccuracy. Students do not leave our classes knowing as much as we do or knowing everything

that was in the book. In order to relieve the instructor of Atlas' burden and foster more active learning on the part of the students, instructors must reorient not only themselves and the materials they use, but also the students. They must change students' expectations of what happens inside the language classroom so that students know how to become 'competent members' of the class" (17). In other words, teachers cannot learn for students, so our new responsibility is to create and offer situations (or, to use the Vygotskian term, experiences) which will allow learners to use the target language in meaningful exchanges that make acquisition and learning possible.

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